

## Life-Writing: The Diary *A Woman In Berlin*

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### Abstract

*The following article analyses a wartime diary A Woman in Berlin. The diary documents seven weeks in Berlin at the end of the Second World War. Since the women were a majority of the population as the German men were captured or killed in a war, they became an easy target for the foreign troops marching through the city. Due to the sensitive topics disclosed in the diary, the author called herself "Anonymous". The journal was published straight after the war, however, the ones who survived the atrocities of the war did not want to be reminded of the war horrors again. Hence, the diary remained forgotten until 2003 when it was republished to audience acclaim. Despite the public opinion that the author's identity should remain anonymous, in 2003 the author's identity was revealed as Marta Hillers. This article depicts three main topics: the author's self-identity as revealed in her diary, the reflection of the enemy through humour and irony, and the diary as a means of survival. The theoretical part discusses the concepts of life writing and diary. In order to grasp a full understanding of the historical circumstances of the German women life writing, a brief historical background is provided.*

**Key words:** life writing, diary, Second World War, *A Woman in Berlin*, humour, irony.

### Introduction

The diary *A Woman in Berlin* (first published in Germany 1953, translated in English and published in 1954) was written by Anonymous. This diary was written by a young German woman who

witnessed the fall of Berlin during World War II. The author describes everyday life in Berlin after the Red Army troops have reached the Third Reich's capital. Since the author discusses sexual assault which many Berlin women suffered from when the Red Army marched into the city, the book was completely ignored by the German audience. For the readers this book represented "a voice describing the lived experience of horror that the mind almost always prefers to forget, the examination of painful memories, the questioning of the impact it has on the self, and the inner struggle to survive, at all costs" (Grant 2005). While the author was alive, she never published her diary for the second time as after first publication she "was accused of besmirching the honour of German women" (Harding 2003) and people who survived the war did not want "the events that humiliated and violated them, their mothers and grandmothers to be held up to public examination" (Roberts 2008).

It took some time for this memoir to earn the recognition of the readers and critics. In 2003 the book was republished to massive critical acclaim and took its position in the bestsellers list (Harding 2003). At the same year, the identity of the diary's author was revealed. Two years after the author's death in 2003, Jens Bisky, one of Germany's leading literary editors, identified the author of a diary as Marta Hillers. The 2003 book's edition was published under the same Anonymous pen-name as the original in 1953. Although the author's identity was revealed, the German poet and essayist Hans Magnus Enzensburger insisted "that its author [...] should remain anonymous" (Harding 2003). Marta Hillers was known as a "journalist, also she studied at Sorbonne, and had written for German newspapers and magazines" (Harding 2003). This piece of information reveals that the author of the journal was well educated, in fact, the diary reveals that Hillers was able to speak Russian and French, understood Latin. The fact that the diary's author was a journalist plays a crucial role. In her journal Marta Hillers was not restrained with thematic, censorship or language norms as in the newspaper. In a diary she could reveal the most secret ideas and criticize government. Hence, these aspects constructed her narrative.

The following article's section includes characteristics which define *life writing* and *diary*. Further in the article a brief discussion of German women diaries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be provided as well as historical background which is necessary in order to grasp an

understanding of social circumstances of the era. The article focuses on the thematic analysis of Marta Hillers diary. The following themes are analysed: writing that reveals the author's self-identity, reflection of the enemy through the humour and irony prism, and the diary as a means of survival. Despite the fact that the author wrote a diary under *Anonymous* pseudonym, in this text the real name Marta Hillers is used.

### **Life Writing and Diary**

The term *life writing* seems straight forward, however, the term's intricacy lies in the fact that it is an inclusive term. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the terms *life writing*, *autobiography*, and *biography* were all woven together. As notices Kadar (1992), "at that time it [life writing] was equivalent to biography, and biography used to be considered more generally to include autobiography" (Kadar 1992:3). In the current context, the life writing's characteristics have altered, however, it still remains an inclusive term since "it favours autobiography, but includes letters, diaries, journals, and (even) biography" (Kadar 1992: 5). This article focuses on the diary, hence, other life writing's constituents will not be discussed here.

*Cambridge Dictionary Online* defines the term *diary* in two ways. The first one is "a book in which you record your thoughts or feelings or what has happened each day" (*Cambridge Dictionary Online*). The second definition notes that a diary is "a book with a separate space or page for each day, in which you write down your future arrangements, meetings, etc" (*Cambridge Dictionary Online*). In the context of this analysis, the first definition seems more suitable, hence, in the following paragraphs the term *diary* will be used in a form of a book in which one registers feelings, emotions, and events.

The first diaries appeared in the form of accounting books. Possibly, these books were an inspiration for the people starting less financial and more personal journals (Lejeune 2009: 51). The beginning era of the diaries is dated from the 14<sup>th</sup> century when the records of the first "family book" was found (Lejeune 2009: 51). However, there is very little information on diaries during the Antique or the Middle Ages. Lejeune (2009) argues that during the days of the Rome Empire, individuals kept records of their finances and chronicles which included some family events (Lejeune 2009: 52).

The spread of the paper in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the invention of the mechanical clock in the 14<sup>th</sup> century accelerated the development of diary writing (Lejeune 2009: 55-57).

There are no exact numbers of the people who keep diaries. However, those who write diaries, do not have an intention to see their private writings published (Popkin 2009: 2). On the same note, the diarists do not label themselves as authors, although, when they sit down with their pens or at the keyboards, “they become indistinguishable from novelists, poets, or autobiographers” (Popkin 2009: 2). The written word, no matter the genre or format, offers a kind of immortality for the one who wrote it. As Popkin (2009) notices, “the diary is the point where life and literature meet” (Popkin 2009: 2).

There are several qualities which describe the diary. The diary “freezes” the words and thoughts written in a certain period of time. It serves as a tool for observation of identity in the process, and it becomes part of the identity creation process (Rak 2009: 24). The diary could be considered a more intimate form of writing than an autobiography considering that the diary records personal experiences rather than life facts. In this case, the writer of the autobiography may be reluctant to reveal personal thoughts and experiences. The process of writing an autobiography is more selective, allowing the writer to carefully evaluate the events and ideas which will be expressed in written words. As an opposite to autobiographies, the diary is not for public reading, “although [...] actual diaries reveal that this is a false dichotomy and that the diary is often both public and private” (Bunkers 2001: 18). Finally, a diary might be seen as a means of comforting the loneliness and as the replacement of the family, friends, a husband or a lover (Martinson 2003: 119). In this case, the diarist might write the memories of the family members or write down the imaginable conversations with a husband or a lover.

A diary, as a form of life writing, has no particular requirements. It can be written daily or periodically, there are no restrictions on the entry's length, there is no plot involved like in other genres. However, it seems that the only existing rule is to start each entry with a printed date, as Popkin (2009) argues, “if writers do not date their entries, they are not keeping diaries” (Popkin 2009: 6). Filling in the blank pages of a diary is not as easy as it could be observed initially. It depends on the attitude employed as writing a diary might be viewed as shallow writing about the everyday routine

or it may be considered as a self-observation and self-improvement. On the same note, the pages of a diary could be called “a mirror”, before which the diarist stands (Culley 1998: 219). The diary helps to develop self-identity, which Giddens (1991) describes as “something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of individual” (Giddens 1991: 52).

The concept of time as expressed in the diary fixates a life from a moment one starts to write a journal. Therefore, it can describe only a short excerpt of life rather than the whole life’s story. The diary’s distinctiveness is characterised by representation a continuous present (Culley 1998: 220) and the diary has no fixed ending. As Lejeune (2009) notices, it is impossible not to notice the beginning of a diary, however, it is difficult to distinguish what marks the end of it (Lejeune 2009: 187-188). The diary might be observed as unfinishable: when all diary’s pages are filled with the records, a new diary can be started from the point where the previous one finished. And yet there is a certain amount of paradox while speaking of the diary’s ending. The open-ended diary is, of course, an illusion, as Popkin (2009) notices, “the author’s death will necessarily bring a diary to a close” (Popkin 2009: 9). However, ending a diary can also be considered as an illusion, since the diary’s text will remain and it can be republished or recopied (Popkin 2009: 9). Broadly speaking, even after the author’s death, the written words still exist, thus representing the continuity of life.

### **Life Writing of the German Women: A Brief Historical Background**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germany went through many historical events. The major points of this era were “the First World War, the Nazi era and beyond, the collapse of the GDR, and German unification” (Woods 2010: 1). Different circumstances dictated particular themes of personal writings. Life writing produced by the German women towards the end of the World War II, when the Red Army reached the city of Berlin, was defined with the “painful memories of gross sexual abuse” (Roberts 2008).

Before World War II, at the beginning of the XXth century, women’s social position was changing. With the women’s rights movement, women were entitled to better education and better wage possibilities (Wilde 2019). All these steps towards equal rights with

the men were crushed at the very beginning of the Nazi era. Nazi ideology claimed that the women should be restricted with the three “K” words: “Kinder (children), Kirche (church), and Küche (kitchen)” (Wilde 2019). Germany needed the growing population to fight the wars and, therefore, families with many children were awarded (Wilde 2017). Despite the limitations on career and education, there were educated women, who have travelled the world, had a career and were well educated. Towards the end of the war most of these educated women, employed diary writing and by recording the war crimes became “the chroniclers of their age” (Moffat and Painter 1975: 3-4).

There were numerous reasons which conditioned the start of World War II. Germany was humiliated after the loss of the World War I, especially with the Versailles Treatment which left Germany with almost no army forces, no air force, and no navy (McNeese 2010: 19). In addition, Germany’s society struggled with the post-war effects: unemployment, inflation, the collapse of the economy (McNeese 2010: 19). These circumstances led to the rise of Adolf Hitler who spoke of the superiority of the Aryan [Germans] race and the need to expand Germany’s borders (McNeese 2010: 21). At the same time, he targeted Jewish people blaming them for a poor economy (McNeese 2010: 21).

Life writing as a genre in Germany became more visible from World War I (Woods 2010: 14). In the swirl of horrible events, a blank page and a pen was the only way to escape. Usually, these writings reflected traumas, violence and suffering (Woods 2010: 5). There were two particular ways in which the war was viewed. As Woods (2010) argues, the “war was said to be a test of manhood and heroism”, however, at the same time it was considered as “the collapse of humanity” (Woods 2010: 14). The latter point of view can be applied when discussing *A Woman in Berlin* since the main topic is surviving at the most degrading conditions caused to one human being by another one. Life writing in the form of such highly personal war diaries is considered to be a significant source due to the revelation of the inner turmoil of the author (Woods 2010: 15).

When speaking of World War II, it is usual to see the Germans as the aggressors rather than victims. In the academic field, the image of suffering Germans seems somewhat missing, although, the German civilians suffered the Allies bombing raids and “much of the capital of the Reich had been reduced to rubble by bombing raids”

(Beevor 2007: 1). In fact, the air raids were very frequent, as Beevor (2007) points out, “with the British by night and the Americans by day” (Beevor 2007: 2). At the same time, the German women were the victims of violence and mass rapes committed by the Red Army (Schmitz 2007: 2). Since Berlin was a city virtually without men, German women were an easy target. As notices Grossmann (2011), “German men had been killed, wounded or taken prisoner, leaving women to clean ruins, scrounge for material survival, and serve the occupiers, often as sexual partners and victims (Grossmann 2011: 137). As Grossmann further points out, “one Berlin district counted 1,873 women to 1,000 men in August 1945, and the city ratio was 169 to 100. In August the total population was counted at 2,784,112 (1,035,463 male, 1,748,649 female)” (Grossmann 2011: 284).

In these circumstances, the women in Germany had only a few options. The first one was to commit suicide, as Davies (2006) points out, “it was not unknown for German families, especially in the eastern provinces, to debate such a course of action collectively” (Davies 2006: 341). The second option was to seek protection and become a mistress of The Soviet army officers (Davies 2006: 341). The second option was influenced by extreme deprivation and was seen as the only way of survival. Sleeping for food or becoming a “front wife” became somewhat a norm, a duty among other daily routines.

Such an experience witnessed at the downfall of Berlin in 1945 was, of course, not something women wanted to share publically. Moreover, the stories when told to the public, were completely ignored, as Simic (2018) observes, yet these women [Germans] were ignored and invisible as victims for decades – they were denied victimhood because the Germans collectively seen as responsible for the horrors of WWII and, as such, its people could not be perceived as “legitimate” victims of war” (Simic 2018: 18).

Due to the braveness of the women who were not afraid to reveal the shocking facts, nowadays people are aware of different history from the one presented in the mainstream discourse. *A Woman in Berlin* was among the first to reveal the horror at the downfall of Berlin and “for the first time lifted the silence surrounded mass rapes committed in Berlin” (Simic 2018: 18). *A Woman in Berlin* by Marta Hillers contributes significantly to the diversification of truths about the life of German women during World War II. Her

diary serves as a significant source “because it gives an insight into the inner turmoil of the author” (Woods 2010: 15).

### **Author’s Self-Identity in The Diary *A Woman In Berlin***

The literature on the subject discusses that there is no one universal definition of the term *identity*. As pointed out by Lawler (2008), “part of the slipperiness of the term *identity* derives from the difficulties of defining it adequately” (Lawler 2008: 2). Woodard (2004) defines identity as “an idea of who we are and how we relate to others and to the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not (Woodward 2004: 1-2). The term *self-identity* is defined as “something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of individual” (Giddens 1991: 52). In other words, self-identity consists of many qualities which might change through time or because of particular circumstances. In this case, the diary serves as a tool for observation of identity in the process, and it becomes part of identity creation (Rak 2009: 24).

The diary is a genre that involves periodical writing: a person may write a diary every day until death. The author of *A Woman in Berlin* describes every day of her life for seven weeks, until the 22 June 1945. The diary by Marta Hillers begins on Friday, April 20, 1945, as the author points out, “chronicle begun on the day Berlin saw battle for the first time” (Hillers 1954: 9). The diary was written in a present tense and this makes the writing even more dramatic. The author includes details from her personal life, present and past, which help a reader to compose the portrait of the author keeping in mind, that the author hoped to stay *Anonymous*, hence a reader supposed to create an image of the writer himself/herself.

The author describes herself as “pale and blonde and always in the same accidentally rescued winter coat – “released until further notice” by the publishing house” (Hillers 1954: 15). This quotation is very important in several ways: it contains some details about the author’s physical appearance and reveals her occupation. The latter quotation helps to create an image of the diary’s author, hence, it becomes more particularized. When the audience read any type of writing, fiction or non-fiction, an important fact is the age of characters or the writer as in this case. The author reveals her age in conversation with her friend, by saying “good-bye, Gisela, - we’ve both



managed to live for thirty years” (Hillers 1954: 27). This short quotation tells about a missing piece in the portrait. The first twenty pages of the diary reveal some information on the author’s physical appearance, her age and occupation.

Another detail which may help to bring out the writer’s identity is her religion. In the diary, the author never clearly states what she thinks about God or the church. However, some situations reveal her religious feelings. Forwards, on Wednesday, May 9, the author saw three graves of three families. People suicide themselves, and this situation provoked the author to write “for us Western people brought up in the Christian faith, there is always God hanging from a Cross” (Hillers 1954: 130). In the quote the author gives a hint that she might be religious, however, another diary’s entry contradicts this idea: “People like me who don’t belong to any church” (Hillers 1954: 180). The meaning of the religion is often considered in the diary, but the author cannot be defined as pious or atheist as there is not enough evidence in her diary to draw such conclusions.

In the diary, the author does not search for the answer of why Russian troops behave in the way they did. In the historical sources, the fact that during the fall of Berlin in 1945 the Soviet troops raped German women was considered as revenge. As Schaumann (2009) points out, “many Soviet troops turned the injustice they had suffered into acts of retaliation, raping women to strike against the very men from whom they sought vengeance” (Schaumann 2009: 103). On Friday, April 27, 1945, when the author for the first time experienced a sexual assault, she stated to other women: “Don’t worry. I’m still alive. Everything passes” (Hillers 1954: 52). Such a calm reaction suggests her being an incredibly strong person. The fact that after being raped the author does not ask for any solace, is rather unexpected. Instead, she consoles frightened women, by saying that one day “everything passes”. Hence, in addition to already known facts discussed above, the quotation creates a portrait of an emotionally strong woman.

Naturally, writing about surrounding people and giving a few hints about herself, the author cannot exclude information about her family. The author writes about her father, her future husband and her mother. In the entry from April 29, 1945, she writes how her mother would describe her as a baby: “According to her I was one of those pink-and-white babies” (Hillers 1957: 66). Then she writes about

her father: “And the last thing my father is supposed to have told my mother before he went to the war in 1916” (Hillers 1954: 66). These two quotations reveal that, possibly, the author does not have a mother and a father anymore as later in the diary she never mentioned them again. About her current relationship she states: “Had the war not broken out, Gerd and I would have been married long ago; but when Gerd was drafted that dream was over” (Hillers 1954: 64). Considering the absence of the family, as Deborah Martinson (2003) has suggested, the diary might stand as a means of comforting the loneliness and as the replacement for the family and the husband (Martinson 2003: 119).

As it was stated above, the Nazi ideology claimed that the women should be restricted with the three “K” words: “Kinder (children), Kirche (church), and Küche (kitchen)” (Wilde 2019). Despite this, not every woman stuck to this ideology, for example, the author of the diary. She leaves an impression of a well-educated person and the first evidence is her knowledge of the foreign languages. Shocked by the sound of the bombs falling on the Berlin, the author tries to calm herself by writing “in pencil on the walls of my room a Latin couplet” (Hillers 1954: 19). Another situation, when the author exhibited her knowledge, was when the Red Army marched towards Berlin. A record was made on Friday, April 27, 1945: “Practiced my Russian in my mind” (Hillers 1954: 41). The third language, which the author mentions in her diary, is French. The revelation happens when the author communicated with a Russian lieutenant: “flabbergasted, I stammer: “Mais non, pas du tout” (Hillers 1954: 151). Later in the diary, the author explains that before the war broke, she has been “in twelve European countries. I have lived in, among other cities, Moscow, Paris and London” (Hillers 1954: 142). Firstly, the quotation reveals how the author gained the knowledge of foreign languages. At the same time, it discloses the author’s enjoyment of travelling and exploring other cultures.

In the diary *A Woman in Berlin*, the author does not avoid the war theme. Towards the end of the war, the age of the German men called for the war duty varied from teenagers to pensioners. When the author saw the young boys doing their “duty”, the author described in this way: “The fact that these boys have to be wasted before they have matured must violate a law of nature, must outrage the instinct for the preservation of the species” (Hillers 1954: 25). In this situation,

the writer sees a particular danger to the human race as she writes: "This mustn't be. That it is so, is a symptom of madness" (Hillers 1954: 25). The situation described in Hiller's diary evokes Popkin's (2009) discussion that "the diary thus becomes a sensitive indicator of trends in cultural history, and a prime source for the exploration of women's experience in the past" (Popkin 2009: 8).

Between 1933 and 1945, Germany was ruled by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. As it was observed by McNeese (2010), "by January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler was the number-two man in all of Germany" and "he soon began creating a totalitarian state" (McNeese 2010: 20). In the diary, there are some statements which reveal the author's attitude towards the authority. In an entry from Saturday, May 5, the author writes how she tries to cope with cold: "I'm sitting in the stool in front of our stove which we keep going with all kinds of Nazi literature" (Hillers 1954: 108). In later records, the author expresses her overt critics to the Third Reich. The concept of the *Third Reich*, as notices Finlay (2009), is the synonym of the Nazi government (Finlay 2009: 59). In a record on Tuesday, May 8, the author describes her conversation with a man, who had been hidden in the same cellar with her before the Red Army invasion. They talked about their knowledge of the Russian language, their travels through the Soviet Union. After the conversation, the author in her diary expressed an idea that "the Third Reich had weaned us from such indiscretions" (Hillers 1954: 124). Here the author says that people, due to the political circumstances, did not trust anyone and saw the enemies virtually everywhere.

Marta Hiller's diary reveals that the author is not a supporter of the Nazi regime. Before discussing the next quotation, it is crucial to mention Hitler's politics against Jewish people. When Hitler was elected in 1933, he "spoke of the superiority of the Aryan [Germans] race" (McNeese 2010: 21). The scale of Hitler's desire of "pure" Germany is more than shocking: as nearly as six million Jews were sent to the gas chambers in concentration camps established across Poland. As notices McNeese (2010), "before his stranglehold on Germany ended in 1945, Hitler would carry out a racist campaign of extermination against the Jews" (McNeese 2010: 21). When it was clear that Germany lost the war, the diary's author states: "The Nazis have given themselves too many airs, have gone too far in tormenting people" (Hillers 1954: 156). The quotation reveals that Hillers does

not suffer because of the lost war, neither does she show any peeve or anger. The idea suggests that the concept of the lost war is excepted as a punishment for tormenting people.

Tobey (2005) claims that “Germans are some of the hardest-working people on the planet” (Tobey 2005). This statement, with a tangible sense of irony, is illustrated in the diary when the author writes about her trip to the other city. During a journey, a writer noticed flags of the war winners hanging in the balconies as she writes: “These little flags – how could it be otherwise in our country? – are neatly hemmed by female hands” (Hillers 1954: 132). Another feature which is characterized in her diary is the thoroughness. As Tobey (2005) further argues, “the Germans never do something half-way. They are masters of organization and give great attention to detail” (Tobey 2005). This sentence is clearly illustrated in *A Women in Berlin*. The situation emerged on Thursday, April 26, when the author tried to find out “if there’s any pudding powder left after yesterday’s bombing” (Hillers 1954: 39). The owner of the shop, who at the same time was a clerk, “spends his time running round asking his customers for pennies [...] to be able to give them the correct change” (Hillers 1954: 39). The author assesses this situation by saying that “all this [searching for the change] while the firing goes on. Such things exist only here, only in this country. Insisting on being correct, that’s how we’ll go down into the grave” (Hillers 1954: 39). Despite the German people being reluctant to relinquish their usual habits in unusual situations, the author admits that she could never live abroad, as she states, “I feel I belong to my country, am determined to share its fate, even its present one” (Hillers 1954: 142). The writer demonstrates a strong loyalty to her origins, despite the gloomy future.

At the end of the analysis of the author self-identity, the readers have a portrait of an educated, loyal to her roots, emotionally and mentally strong woman. The writer gives a unique opportunity to glimpse into the historical events which, if there were no brave women as the author herself, would have been remained unknown.

### **Enemy’s Reflection through Humour and Irony**

At first glance, it seems like a sentence containing the words “humour” and “war” in the same context is completely wrong and unlikely. However, humour reflects “the grotesque, sometimes

surreal, images of the time” (Beevor 2007: 2). In fact, before Christmas in 1944 a common joke among Berliners was “be practical: give a coffin” (Beevor 2007: 1). Although a concept of humour is something which seems well known, it proves to be difficult to define. As observed by Kazecki (2012), it is hard to analyse the concept of humour as its definition should “encompass the complexity of the phenomenon, explain the enormously broad spectrum of humour appearances, and satisfy all investigators of humour” (Kazecki 2012: 11). Early humour definitions put humour and laughter into the same context (Kazecki 2012: 11). Later researches addressed this issue and perceived laughter and humour as two different phenomena, stating that “non-humorous situations can also induce laughter, especially under conditions of extreme and conflicting impulses” (Kazecki 2012: 12).

Critchley (2002) offered to define the term *humour* as “laughing at others” with “tiny explosions of humour that we call jokes [...] of shared life-world practices” (Critchley 2002: 90). In other words, the jokes often include laughing at other people and at the situations which occur in daily life. *Oxford Dictionary Online* defines the term *humour* as “the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech” (*Oxford Dictionary Online*). Most frequently the concept of *irony* is defined as “saying what is contrary to what is meant” (Colebrook 2004: 1). This definition dates back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and it is attributed to Roman orator Quintilian (Colebrook 2004: 1).

The Russian soldiers become the topic where the author employs irony and humour the most often. Her first Russian “boyfriend” became a soldier named Petka. The author describes him as “a giant, broad as wardrobe, with the paws of lumberjack, and white teeth” (Hillers 1954: 51). In an entry on April 27, 1945, she writes about Petka’s feelings towards her: “He assures me that the hours without me have been endless, [...] that he is glad, so glad to set eyes on me again” (Hillers 1954: 53). However, the writer decides that he is not suitable for protection because “although Petka is as strong as a horse and looks clean, he is [...] too primitive” (Hillers 1954: 58). Later in the diary, in an entry from Wednesday, May 30, the author remembers Petka as a Romeo and writes with an irony: “Maybe one day Petka in his Siberian forest will also play his lumberjack’s paw over his heart and rolling his eyes, utter my name – that is, if he

doesn't shower it with curses" (Hillers 1954: 183). As it could be noted, the author does not write about Petka with anger but instead she creates a humorous image of a soldier. This suggests that maybe for her it is easier to release the negative emotions by writing with humour than with anger.

The German women, during the Red Army invasion in Berlin, started a relationship with the soldiers due to the severe conditions, especially the lack of food. Since the battlefield moved to Berlin, it was difficult to find anything edible. On Wednesday, May 16, the author writes about Russians moving away from Berlin, meaning that nobody left to supply food for the women. Hiller (1954) writes: "There's no new provider on the horizon, my stock has sunk very low" (Hillers 1954: 182). The author of the diary lived with a widow and a man, named Pauli, for whom a widow had rented a room before he was called to join the Volkssturm. When he came back, he was anxious about this situation, as a writer points out, he "begrudges my every potato I put in my mouth" (Hillers 1954: 154). When a new supplier appeared the author writes: "Why, for the few intervening days, should I "sleep" some food into the house for this lazy Herr Pauli?" (Hillers 1954: 154). The most important word in the previous quote is "sleep" since it very clearly describes the situation women were forced into. Men, in this case soldiers, got a sexual relationship, women, who were forced to betray their beliefs in case to survive, got food.

The sexual relationship based on mutual benefits was so common that affected women invented a new language. This bizarre language showed some kind of a connection between the food and how it was gained. In other words, it is a connection between a person, who provided the food and a type of provided ration. In the diary the author describes this situation by writing that "we [women] have recently been developing a strange jargon; we talk about major-sugar, rape-shoes, loot-wine, and pilfer-coal" (Hillers 1954: 154). According to the writer, "a strange jargon", as she calls it, may be read in this way: sugar, which was provided by a Russian major for some "services"; shoes, which were gained because of a rape, like some kind of a gift; wine, which "found" an owner during a loot; and coal, which was stolen from someone.

In later entries, the author pays attention to other qualities of the Russian people. On Tuesday, May 8, the author writes: "It's

incomprehensible to me how anyone can ride a bike, dance, and climb stairs with a leg in such a condition [injured]. But these people [Russians] have the constitution of horses” (Hillers 1954: 132). The author compares a Russian major to a horse, and it suggests his endurance and strength. In the other entry, made on Monday, May 14, a writer reveals other characterization of the Russian people. The author writes about a “lorry filled with sacs of flour” (Hillers 1954: 143) for the local bakery. As the author further points out, an owner of a bakery “gives a shout of joy [...] fall round the Russian driver’s neck. [...] They [the Russians] love to play Father Christmas” (Hillers 1954: 143). The author characterizes all the Russian people, by using a pronoun “they”. In this way, a writer labels the nation of the Russians, and by saying “they love to play Father Christmas” probably links presence experience and her past experience before the war.

Viatcheslav Yatsko (2004) argues that “in the commune [Soviet Union] all property was common, private property didn’t exist. Currently to steal everything that is not taken good care of is a kind national sport” (Yatsko 2004). In the diary, the author illustrates the validity of this idea by describing one event in the Moscow office, where she worked with the other two employees. The author writes that while she was bending over a drawer someone stole her nail scissors (Hillers 1954: 180). Despite the loss, Hillers (1954) does not create a negative image. In her diary, she states: “But the Russians have a natural, candid way of doing it [stealing]” (Hillers 1954: 181). A quote gives an idea that the author tries to excuse the Russians habit to steal, saying that they do it differently, even in an attractive way.

The writer surprises by using humour as it seems completely inappropriate in given circumstances. Antony Beevor (2007) argues that Berlin women chose death by suicide over being raped by the soldiers (Beevor 2007). Hillers (1954) opted for a completely different method in order to survive. The author employed irony and humour, for example, on Thursday, May 3 a writer describes how a young Russian sailor asked her if she could find him a girl, who would have to be “a clean and decent one, as well as good and affectionate” (Hillers 1954: 96). The author’s reaction was full of irony: “Next thing they’ll [Russians] want is police certificate of good conduct – before the girl grants them the favor of lying down for them” (Hillers 1954: 96).

In this particular example, Hillers (1954) does not demonstrate any anger against the soldiers or self-pity as one could expect.

In some of the entries, the author expresses her sense of humour by laughing at some features of the soldiers. In one entry, the author writes how an Uzbek, who was in the Russian army, tried to “buy” the author, by suggesting her silk stockings: “You want? I give you. Understand?” (Hillers 1957: 101). The answer was pronounced in her minds: “Sure I understand you, my chubby darling!” (Hillers 1954: 101). In a later entry, there is a similar situation as the author writes about an evening with the Russian men. She describes them dancing and singing, and how she and the rest of the guests tried to persuade an Uzbek to dance: “after endless urgings, he even attempted a dance on his stumpy legs” (Hillers 1954: 108). The adjectives “chubby” and “stumpy” used in the entries shows that the author is not afraid of a man, as she creates an image of a weak, non – masculine person and at the same time reduces an image of the Russian soldiers’ power.

On Wednesday, May 9 the author writes about the huge differences between Western and Eastern countries. As it was mentioned before, the author of the diary visited many countries, including Russia. She remembers that during her visit to Moscow, she “left some German and American magazines” (Hillers 1954: 128). A writer narrates that later she found the magazines with some pages missing, as she writes, “sections of pages had been torn out here and there – advertisements for women’s underwear, brassieres, and girdles” (Hillers 1954: 128). A writer points out that these advertisements would not interest any Western culture man but for Russians it was never seen before. The example of the diary speaks for itself as the differences in attitudes towards sexuality between the Western and Eastern cultures were enormous. The diary’s quotation suggests there was an absence of sexuality in Eastern cultures. As the author envisages, if Russian soldiers would have images of what an ideal woman is, “they’d be less likely to make bee-line for any woman, however old or ugly” (Hillers 1954: 128).

As notices Underhill (2002), “many [Russians] behaved with indiscriminate brutality” (Underhill 2002). However, it cannot be applied to every soldier as the entries in the Hillers diary reveals. As she observes, “German men, especially sick and bedridden ones, have surely nothing to fear from the Russians” (Hillers 1954: 83). In a later entry she adds: “unthinkable that one of these Ivans [Russians]



should appear, swinging his hips, and whisper to a male German: "Man, come". They are hopelessly normal" (Hillers 1954: 83). The idea suggests that between the lines the writer talks about homosexuality. There might be seen a wish that at least one Russian soldier would not be interested in women. Despite the grim rape statistics, the soldiers did not use their superiority against sick and bedridden German men which suggests that judging all Russian soldiers would not be appropriate.

To conclude, the way the author describes Russian soldiers suggests that her knowledge and education were above her emotions. There is no disrespect or accusations because of the lost war. The way the writer talks about the Russians convey an idea that she tries to link her knowledge with the present situation, denying the negative image. Sleeping with the enemy for food might have broken her dignity but not her volition. This is clearly seen in her diary entries, when the author instead of being angry or full of self-pity, created the humorous stories.

### ***A Woman in Berlin: a diary as a means of survival***

Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter (1975) argue that "the diary is often turned to when the writer is unhappy or in a particular kind of mood" (Moffat and Painter 1975: 7). Many entries in the Hillers diary illustrates this statement, as the author uses her diary to express her feelings as well as emotions both the negative and positive. According to Schaumann (2009), "German civilian women were among the first, and even foremost, affected by bombardment, displacement, occupation, and expulsion" (Schaumann 2009: 102). On April 21, 1945, the author writes: "Bombs, the walls swayed. My fingers are still trembling round the fountain pen" (Hillers 1954: 16). Similar mood, soaked in fear, was found in another entry: "I'm writing with trembling fingers. Thirty minutes ago the fourth floor was hit" (Hillers 1954: 33). The situation described in the diary evokes Gusdorf's (2014) discussion that "recapitulation of a life lived claims to be valuable for the one who lived it, and yet it reveals no more than a ghostly image of that life" (Gusdorf 2014: 38).

Several diary's entries convey the importance of the diary. After the Russian invasion to Berlin on Friday, April 27, 1945, the author writes: "[I] have just refilled my fountain pen, and write, write – try to write all the confusion out of my head and heart" (Hillers

1954: 54). In this case, the writing serves as a subsidiary implement, when the author outlets intense emotions which are not appropriate for public expression. At the same time, *A Woman in Berlin* is the diary where the author without fear of judgment can evaluate her decisions and herself. For example, a writer wonders why she stays with the Russian major, as she states, "I'm pretty sure that one word from me would be enough for him to leave and never come back" (Hillers 1954: 97). While analysing this odd behaviour she writes: "Can I be doing this out of sympathy, from need for love?" (Hillers 1954: 97). Another entry of self-reflection where the author considers herself as a whore, who sells her body in exchange for food: "While writing this I ask myself why I'm taking such a moral attitude, acting as though the profession of a whore were so beneath my dignity" (Hillers 1954: 98). In both entries, the author consults the diary as a loyal friend who is always near. Hence, a conclusion could be drawn that it helps the author to survive hard moments as well as to divert her negative thoughts with the help of the diary. As the author claims, "even keeping this journal is an effort nowadays, but it's a comfort in my loneliness, a kind of conversation, a pouring out heart" (Hillers 1954: 199).

As in most of the cases, the diary is meant for a private reading, the writer uses it to register various emotions. Since the author was able to speak Russian, she quite often was involved in situations where she had to communicate with the Russian soldiers. Due to this act, the writer states: "I admit I'm afraid and prefer to remain unnoticed" (Hillers 1954: 80). Yet another example is an entry made on Wednesday, May 9, when the writer describes her emotions regarding the departing Russian major, with who she had a relationship. When he left, the author writes: "I felt little sad, empty" (Hillers 1954: 129). The sentence encloses that there might be romantic feelings for a Russian major. It was dangerous to admit it since during the fall of Berlin it could be seen as an act of betrayal and women, of course, were punished for having romances with an enemy.

Despite the numerous entries where the diary's author employs humour and irony, there are some writings which reveal the true emotions. One of such records was made on Thursday, May 10, when the author had a walk through the Berlin. She described the city with "the streets lie empty and silent, the houses appear to be

locked and deserted” (Hillers 1954: 131 – 132). At the end of the day’s record, the author writes: “I found it difficult to go to sleep. Gloomy thoughts. A depressing day” (Hillers 1954: 137). Another entry where a writer shows her weakness was made when she started to live on her own. Separating from her other two “flatmates” happened due to the lack of food as they decided she is no longer useful. The author’s reaction was expressed in this way: “the bitterest part in the life of a single woman is that sooner or later she is in other people’s way [...] And now I’ve gone and smudged this page with tears” (Hillers 1954: 182). This entry is important in several ways. First, it blasted an idea that the author of the diary always writes in an observer’s manner. Second, in the entry the writer identifies herself as a “single woman” which she had never expressed in the previous entries.

*A Woman in Berlin* is a wartime diary and, naturally, it describes many shocking events. On Sunday, May 6, 1945, the author writes about a woman who worked in a liquid factory and was captured by the Russian soldiers. While searching for more spirits, the Russians found a woman and raped her. The author rewrites the words of a factory worker in her diary: “They [Russians] queued up... She thinks there were at least twenty” (Hillers 1954: 113). The writer of a diary, remembering this horrible event, states: “At the memory of it I feel like retching again and can hardly write” (Hillers 1954: 113). As the author is a female rewriting other female’s experience, it would suggest the idea that she herself could have been in the same situation. Naturally, it is extremely difficult to hear such stories and, especially, to remember it again by writing it down. Despite all the negative connotations of the story, Hillers (1954) decided to write it down and in this way cope with the negative emotions.

In one of the last entries, the writer tells about her husband, who had defected the army. After being separated for a long time and all the hardships, the author admits being “wildly happy” (Hillers 1954: 204). Unfortunately, the war changed her husband as Hillers (1954) writes: “When I said nothing he grew annoyed, when I became animated and started describing some of the adventures [...] then the real trouble began” (Hillers 1954: 205). In the eyes of her husband, she “turned into shameless bitches – every one of you in this house!” (Hillers 1954: 205). This situation clearly and painfully illustrates the idea that the shame and the blame were placed on women by their husbands (Schaumann 2009: 103). At the same time, men had no

sympathy for their wives and girlfriends, nor an idea of what they have experienced.

The last record in the diary was made on June 22, 1945. Despite Lejeune's (2009) idea that it is difficult to distinguish what marks the end of the diary (Lejeune 2009: 187-188), in a case of *A Woman in Berlin* the diary has a clear ending. As the diary's author states: "Nor do I intend to continue this diary. I'm no longer in the mood for it" (Hillers 1954: 203). The last record of the diary was written during the time when the war was finally over and the city of Berlin was free from the foreign troops. The author writes: "I hope to survive – hope for it in a completely primitive, animal way" (Hillers 1954: 207). Since the initial version of the diary was full of shortenings and abbreviations, the author, in order to keep herself busy, decided to type her journals without the abbreviations and shortenings. Her husband, not willing to cope with what Hillers (1954) has suffered from, left her. However, the author expressed an idea that he might get back by saying that "I'd like to read it [a diary without abbreviations] when he [Gerd] comes home" (Hillers 1954: 207). Overall, the diary ends in a rather depressing mood but the author impresses with her determination: "Whatever happens, I won't easily be shattered by anything again" (Hillers 1954: 206). It is clear that all the horrible experience made her much stronger and if needed she would fight for her life again.

## **Conclusions**

This paper aimed to create a portrait of diary's author, reveal humour and irony which Hiller used when writing about the daily life under the Russian troops' influence, and prove that a piece of paper and a pen might help to survive. These aims were reached by collecting the relevant quotes in the diary. The theoretical part supported the data collected with the most prominent works written by Beevor (2007), Grossmann (2011), Kadar (1992), and Lejeune (2009). At the same time, the relevant terms were defined: life writing, diary, irony, and humour.

The author of *A Woman in Berlin* employs irony and humour which seem do not match the diary's content and atrocious events the author was a part of. This unique writing style reveals the author's self-identity and helps a reader to create a writer's image. Surprisingly, there is no self-pity, the author registers events from the

perspective of an observer. According to the sources, in the days when the Red Army reached Berlin, many women committed suicides. With the help of the diary, Hillers (1954) distanced herself from the shocking events and it helped her to stay alive during hard times. At a risk that her diaries might be found, the author documented historical events and at the same time war crimes against German women. It took many years for this memoir to draw attention to the heroism of ordinary women. The diary revealed a different side of a war and repudiated a wide-spread opinion that only men participate in a war. The diary *A Woman in Berlin* proved that women were battling in order to survive and not to crumble under harsh conditions, both mental and physical.

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